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III.—THE RUNIC INSCRIPTION ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT SWORD.

On page 459 of the third volume of his *Old Northern Runic Monuments*, and on page 245 of his *Handbook*, Stephens gave a cut of an Anglo-Saxon sword found on the Isle of Wight and now in the British Museum. Of this he wrote the following facts and fancies: "Found about the middle of this century in an Old English grave. But the runes were first seen in 1882 by Aug. W. Franks, Esq., the Director. . . . The runes are on the inner side of the silver scabbard-mount, and were only seen lately when the piece was cleaned. Hence their perfect preservation, tho so slightly cut-in. They have been hidden for some 1300 winters! . . . In this case the owner had cut this spell, singing therewith some chaunt of supernatural power, to overcome the easier his unsuspecting enemy. All such witchcraft and amulet-bearing etc. was strictly forbidden. Whatever the staves mean, this is the only such *secret* rune-risting yet found." Stephens' rendering is, as usual, quite worthless: "? Awe (*terror, death and destruction*) *to-the-sere (brynne, armor, weapons, of the foe)*!"

Stephens mistook the open *w*-rune for a peculiar form of the *s*-rune, and read: "? æco sœri!" On another occasion I shall show the mythical character of this *s*-rune. For the present it will suffice to say that, at best, it could be only a late variant of the upright 𐌗. Now, the only other Old-English runic inscription that shows the archaic form of the *c*-rune (𐌺) is the gold coin (Stephens, *Bracteates*, No. 74), which has the most archaic form of the *s*-rune (𐌸). To suppose, then, that our inscription had by the side of its archaic 𐌺 a modified form of the youngest *s*-rune would, of course, be absurd.

Mr. Read assures me that Stephens' reproduction of the writing is exact. The runes are perfectly distinct and normal, except that the *w*-rune is open at the top :—



Such incomplete closures are common in all writing and may even become conventional. Compare, for example, the opening of B to $\mathfrak{B}$ and of R to $\mathfrak{R}$ in various hands, for example, the Gothic, and the change of Greek Δ to Λ , whence Runic $\mathfrak{F}$. Similarly in this inscription, as frequently elsewhere, we find $\mathfrak{R}$ for $\mathfrak{K}$. The second rune is the *c*-rune in the archaic form referred to above. As shown by Wimmer (*Die Runenschrift*, p. 87), it is intermediate between the original $\angle$ and the later $\mathfrak{k}$.

The runes are to be transliterated :—

$\tilde{a}\check{e}\check{o}$ $w\check{e}r\ddot{i}$,

that is, 'self defence,' than which there could hardly be a more appropriate legend for a sword.

$\tilde{a}\check{e}\check{o}$ is the nominative singular feminine of a *jo*-adjective that would appear in ordinary Old English in the nominative masculine as $\tilde{a}\check{e}$, and corresponds exactly to OHG. *eichi* 'proprius', 'pertaining to one's self', 'one's own'. In Old High German, too, the word was dying out, being found only in the compound *ur-eichi*. The root is one of those that show Indo-European interchange of voiced and voiceless final stops :—

IE. *aig* / *aik*
 Gc. *aik* *aih* / *aig*
 cf. Goth. *-aikan* *-aihan* / *aigan*.¹

¹ I had for some time associated *-aikan* in this way with *aigan* before I observed that it had been done before, cf. Brugmann², I, p. 630. (The latest that I had come across was Kögel's note in PBB. 16, p. 512, in which

One might ask: Is the *-o* of our inscription the original long *-ō* that became *u*, or is it the later short *-o* that unstressed *-u* in time sank to? The earliest Old-English literary monuments have uniformly *-u* in such cases (Cosijn, II, p. 76, 77). As there can be no question that our inscription is still earlier, we must conclude that we have before us the original long *ō*. This is of importance, disproving, as it does, certain current ideas as to the processes of syncope and apocope in Old English (Sievers, § 135, 3, etc.), as I shall show in a forthcoming paper on the apocope of Gc. *ō* > *u*.

wāerī is the exact Old-English counterpart of OHG. *wuorī* 'dam, weir', MHG. *wuor(e)*, *wüer(e)* 'dam', Austrian, Bavarian, Swiss *wuer*, *wüer* 'dam', Corinthian *wuore*, *wüere* 'mill-race'; whence Swiss *stein-uere* 'long stone pile', Rumonic *vuor*, Italian *gora* 'mill-race'. It is an *in*-stem and would appear in later Old English as *wēru*, the nouns of this class having assumed the *-u* of strong nouns, because they had become identical with them in the oblique cases (Streitberg, U. G., § 180, p. 259, Bülbring, § 383). As is pointed out by Sievers (§ 279 A₃), the old ending *-ī* is betrayed in literary Old English by the constant *i*-mutation of the root vowel, as also by the palatalization of the intervening velar consonant. Our inscription furnishes the first case yet discovered of the actual older form in *-ī*.¹ The original *ō* of the stem stands in gradation with the *a* of Gothic *warjan* 'keep off, prevent', OIc. *vörn*, OSw. *værn*, OHG. *weri* 'defence', MHG. *wer*, Ger. *wehr* 'defence, dam', OE. *wer* 'weir, dam'.

he defends the old idea that the word means 'speak'.) For similar semasiological developments, cf. English *to own* 'possess as one's own', 'acknowledge as one's own', 'acknowledge to be true', 'confess', 'grant', *to disown* 'refuse to acknowledge as one's own', 'deny', *to claim* 'demand as one's due', 'maintain to be true', *to disclaim* 'deny ownership of', 'disavow responsibility for', *to appropriate* (Latin *approprio*) 'take to one's self', 'claim or use as one's own', 'set apart for, or assign to, a particular person or use', 'annex, as a benefice, to a spiritual corporation, as its property'—cf. OHG. *in-eihhan*, *neihhan*, 'dedicate', 'consecrate'.

¹ The form *hæte* by the side of *hætu* is probably due to the influence of *ēiele*, rather than a mark of archaic usage.

Stephens estimated the date of the inscription as “? 500–600”. When we consider that, not only had Germanic *ai* become *ā* and this *ā* been mutated to *æ*, but the *i* that caused the mutation had already been syncopated, so early a date is out of the question. It should also be observed that, in distinction from the usage on the gold coin, *ƿ* had already come to be the sign for *o* of whatever origin, and *ƿ* had been restricted to the representation of the mutated *o*, or *œ*. The points in which the language of our inscription differs from that of the literary Old English of Alfred’s time are few and pertain only to the shortening and lowering of final vowels and the attraction of the nominative of the *in*-stems to that of *ō*-stems. The use of *œ*, rather than the later *e*, does not argue great antiquity; for, not to mention its use in the North, we find traces of it even in the *Cura Pastoralis*. In view of these considerations, I do not see that we can place the inscription much, if any, earlier than 800 A. D. There is nothing in it to mark any specific dialect, and I therefore see no reason for supposing that it does not belong to the district where it was found, that is, to Jutish territory.

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